

Disaster Preparedness, Planning, and Mitigation

Planning for a disaster is planning for the inevitable; a matter of “when,” not “if.” As individuals and as a community we accept that disasters will occur, we come to terms with their impacts, and we try to minimize them through planning. It is **the priority** that often will suddenly shift—from last to first. Cultural resources take their greatest losses during or after disasters, when portions and sometimes even entire objects, buildings, structures, and districts are lost. Therefore, disaster preparedness and planning should be inextricable elements of our cultural resource stewardship. The articles in this second issue of *CRM* on disaster management focus on disaster preparedness, planning, and mitigation.¹

While we can plan for natural disasters based on our shared past experiences, we cannot plan for the ever-escalating loss of life and destruction caused by terrorist attacks. The September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, resulting in a death toll over 5,000 people, were unprecedented in method, magnitude, and impact. While the physical impact was local, the psychological shock waves were reverberating globally. Inadvertently, this special issue of *CRM* is both timely and topical. It had long been edited and was being readied for publication when the events occurred. Indeed, they are still unfolding as this special issue of *CRM* goes to press.

The natural forces that have created and shaped our environment—and produced some of the most scenic and enjoyable places—are still at work. Vicki Sandstead’s article makes some very good points: it is only recently that disasters have been considered anything other than acts of God; almost everything is located in one disaster zone or another; disasters will continue to happen; and the National Park Service does not adequately plan for potential disasters.

Disaster preparedness planning is a cycle that includes feedback that is used in revising

plans with new data and knowledge learned from the last disaster.

The recent Nisqually Earthquake in Washington State resulted in a significant loss of material history. The role of Historic Seattle, a non-profit community preservation organization, is documented by Heather MacIntosh. She stresses the need for the preservation community to establish a relationship with the larger community before any disaster and how it would have made a difference. But the earthquake affected the resources of a much larger area than Seattle and Olympia. Michael Sullivan’s description of the regional assessment survey, documentation, and findings helps us to understand the scope of the damage and to better plan for when we will need to respond rapidly to save what remains after a disaster. The recovery phase will be based on the excellent work done during the response phase. Planning is a loop. The feedback from the response and recovery should be incorporated into the revision of the next disaster preparedness plan.

Planning is the key to reducing vulnerability, loss of life, injuries, and damage. The properties of the National Trust for Historic Preservation are insured by Chubb Insurance, which requires each property to have a disaster preparedness plan. In Charity Roy’s article, she takes a business approach to disaster preparedness. By substituting “organization” or “park” for “business” or “company” and “superintendent” for “CEO,” her advice is applicable to almost any situation.

The only thing better than learning from one’s own mistakes (and successes) is learning from those of others. It is also much less painful. Those who have been through recent disasters (and survived) need to assess what worked and what failed or under-performed.

The National Park Service (NPS) is self-insured. Until very recently, few parks have included cultural resources in their emergency preparedness. The NPS *Management Policies* and the NPS Cultural Resource Challenge now

include cultural resource protection and emergency preparedness.²

Parks with frequent disasters, such as Harper's Ferry National Historical Park (NHP), have had to deal with repeated events such as floods. Not surprisingly, these parks are far more advanced in their planning for protecting cultural resources during and after disasters than parks that have very infrequent emergencies. Our irreplaceable resources are especially vulnerable to natural and anthropogenic disaster during treatment when the protection and fate of the resource are in the hands of a contractor. Bruce Noble discusses the benefits of advance planning. Decisions made before the floods helped Harpers Ferry NHP recover quickly from the two 1996 floods. Peter Dessauer and David Wright recount how the precautions taken during construction reduced losses.

People generally think of disasters as events that occur suddenly, causing damage in a matter of seconds, hours, or days. Some disasters, however, occur so slowly that we suddenly realize we are in a disaster that has been underway for some time and may continue for an extended period of time. Dryland salinity falls into this category, as discussed in the article by Dirk Spennemann. The cumulative damage may not be known for years and the public may not be aware or concerned until the damage reaches crisis proportions.

Disaster recovery includes not only the repair of damage but retrofit to reduce future damage from future disasters. Prior to the repair, retrofit, and the restoration of the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, Giorgio Croci had to determine the seismic forces for use in the structural analysis and design and to develop innovative solutions. Hopefully, in the future what was learned from this project can be transferred to preventative retrofit of other projects, thus benefiting the planning for and survival of many cultural resources.

We have much to share with and to learn from the rest of the world. Cultural resources in poor countries are vulnerable because of a lack of maintenance, adequate research and documentation of known and unknown resources, and no

resources for recovery. Disasters in developing nations are even more tragic where there are usually no equivalents of our Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), state offices of emergency services, and local emergency agencies. June Taboroff's article focuses on the cultural resource assistance by the World Bank and ProVenton Consortium after disasters.

Randolph Langenbach reports the almost total devastation he observed in India; however, even in the rubble he found indications that "a significant amount of seismic mitigation can be achieved from small differences in construction methods."

Disasters can damage and destroy cultural heritage places, but they also initiate a strong emotional response in the community immediately affected by the events. Some of this response is geared toward memorials and some toward the management of property in a damaged state. If we wish to retain rem(a)inders of these events, do we need to restore them or memorialize them? The paper by Rosemary Hollow and Dirk Spennemann on the management of atrocity sites raises some of these issues.

The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon once more bring into focus human capacity to commit atrocities and humanity's capacity to deal with the aftermath.

Notes

¹ See CRM 23:6, 2000.

² National Park Service Management Policies 2001, "5.3 Stewardship," page 52. Cultural Resource Challenge, U.S. National Park Service, December 2000, pages 15-16.

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